NEW EDITION — EXTENSIVELY REVISED

Essay Writing for English Tests

GABI DUIGU

- a step by step guide for self-study & the classroom
- with exercises and answer key

Preparing for the IELTS ACADEMIC WRITING TASK 2

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Essay Writing

for

English Tests

Gabi Duigu

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Revised and reprinted 2003

Published by Academic English Press
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Distributed by:
Melting Pot Press
10 Grafton Street
Chippendale NSW 2008
Australia

Ph: (61) 2 9212 1882
Fax: 02 9211 1868
email: books@elt.com.au

ISBN: 0-9578996-1-0

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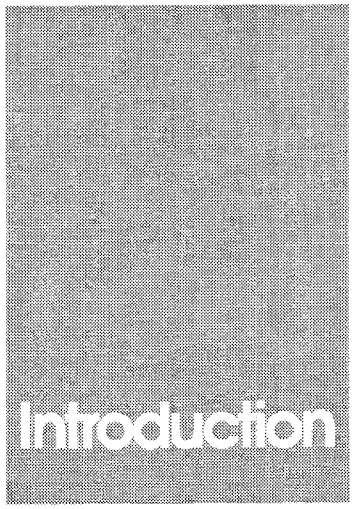


This course describes a step-by-step approach to writing essays for the IELTS Academic Writing Module Task 2 and for other similar essay tasks. It provides exercises to practise the stages individually (Appendix A) as well as giving a list of typical essay topics, and there are model essays given in Appendix B. The Answer Key provides explanations as well as answers.

The Purpose

In order to be able to write good essays it is first of all essential to make sure that you understand the purpose of the task. It may seem obvious: the purpose is to test your ability to write essays for university or college in English. However, a moment's reflection will make it clear that the test task is quite unlike a university essay, since it is typically 1 to 2 pages long and is written on an unprepared topic in about 40 minutes. No university essay is like that. Even in university examinations, where you may have to write about two pages in half an hour, you are expected to have studied the subject in advance.

So let us consider some possible purposes for the English test essay. These can be said to be:

a) to show that you are able to select relevant ideas and information to answer a question
b) to show your knowledge and understanding of the topic
c) to show your ability in presenting a logical argument
d) to show your skills in organising your ideas systematically
e) to show your ability to use sophisticated English
f) to show your basic grasp of English grammar and vocabulary.

These questions can be grouped into 4 categories, which reflect the 4 aspects of an essay:

1. **Understanding the question**	(a)
2. **Knowing the subject**	(b)
3. **Thinking skills**	(a & d)
4. **Language skills**	(e & f)

How should these be ranked in importance? Here is what the IELTS Handbook says for the Academic Writing Task 2:

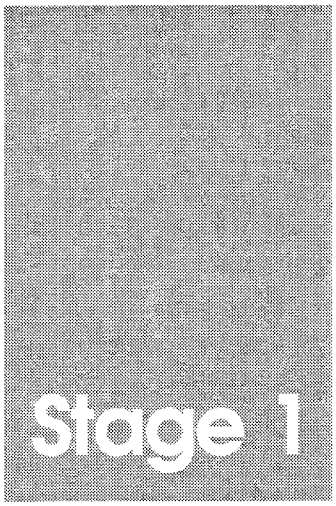
> **In Task 2 candidates are presented with a point of view or argument or problem.**
> **Candidates are assessed on their ability to:**
> - **present the solution to a problem**
> - **present and justify an opinion**
> - **compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications**
> - **evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence or an argument**
>
> **The topics are of general interest and it makes no difference what subjects candidates study. The issues raised are interesting, suitable for and easily understood by candidates entering postgraduate or undergraduate studies.**

This shows that your knowledge of the topic is not the main emphasis in this test. That is not surprising –after all, you are being examined for your writing ability in English, not for your knowledge. The main emphasis is in fact on your ability to **think and argue appropriately** about a common issue. This is because university students need to be able to to analyse and discuss problems and solutions, and evaluate and express opinions. University study is not simply about presenting facts.

In order to argue appropriately there are two stages involved: a) understanding the question clearly, and b) being able to select the right method to present an opinion in a suitable way. This means organising your ideas and your language.

This book therefore deals with these three stages:

I. **Understanding the question**
II. **Selecting and Presenting Ideas Appropriately**
III. **Appropriate Language Use**



The Question

1. Understanding the Question

The first step in essay writing is to analyse the **essay task** which tells you what the topic is, and also gives an indication of what kind of things you are expected to say about the topic.

Essay topics have 3 components:

1) the instruction words, telling you what to do
2) the key words indicating the topic
3) the words restricting the topic, indicating what aspect of the topic you are asked to focus on.

We will consider these one by one.

1.1 The Instructions

Look at these tasks:

a) Describe the role of the Internet in modern society.
b) The environment is the most important issue in the world today. Discuss.

What are the instruction words?

In a) it is **describe** and in b) it is **discuss.** These two words indicate the two most common types of essay that one can write.

If you are asked to **describe** something, then your essay will mostly present *facts* and not opinions. However, if you are asked to **discuss** something, then your *opinion* is being asked for, and you are usually expected to *evaluate* something, or to *argue* for or against something. At university or college you are expected to be able to discuss problems and ideas, rather than simply to report on facts, and so the IELTS essay question presents a common situation or a present-day issue about which people have different opinions, and asks you to give your own views on this topic.

Here is the typical wording of an IELTS essay task:

> **Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no specialist knowledge of the following topic:**
>
> ***We live in a technological age. However, technology cannot solve all the world's problems. Therefore some people argue that we need to place less emphasis on technological solutions and more on other values.***
>
> **To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?**
> **You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience to support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.**

The first part of the instruction makes it clear that

a) you need to present a serious argument in a formal style (for an 'educated reader')
b) you are not being tested on your deep knowledge or understanding of the subject ('with no specialist knowledge').

The last part of the instruction offers a suggestion about what to include. ('You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience to support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.') We will deal with this more in the next section.

Now let us look at the question itself. This also has two components:

a) the description of the topic, which is usually expressed as a point of view on a current situation and
b) a question asking you what your opinion is.

Part a) is generally expressed in 1 to 3 sentences. One or two sentences may present a statement or a question about a situation: ('We live in a technological age, but technology cannot solve all our problems'). The second part will probably present a conclusion that some people draw from this situation ('therefore we should place less emphasis on technology and more on other values'). This is designed to help you to think about the contents. (More about this in the next section.)

Part b) asks the question. This may be phrased as *to what extent do you agree?* or *what is your opinion?* or *do you agree with this?* or words to that effect.

Now, what is your task?

a) to present both sides of the argument?
b) to either strongly support or strongly oppose the argument, depending on your own personal opinion?
c) to partly support or partly oppose the argument, depending on your own personal opinion?

The correct answer is either b) or c).

The words ***to what extent*** mean the same as ***how much.*** That is, your answer will express one of these attitudes:

a) I agree completely
b) I agree partly and disagree partly
c) I disagree completely.

Many students feel that they need to present a strong argument for or against an idea or proposition. This is not true. Even if the words ***to what extent*** do not appear in the question, it is always acceptable to agree or disagree partly with a proposition.

There is another point to remember here. Although it is usually easier to write what you actually believe, it is not absolutely necessary. If you do not have enough ideas or examples to support the side of an argument that you want to support, you can always say something like: ***on the one hand....., but on the other hand*** and present arguments for both sides. However, you should not simply contradict yourself. That is, you should not say ***I agree*** in one section and then ***I disagree*** in the next paragraphs. That sounds as if you are simply confused or are not expressing what you think at all. What you can say is: ***These are some arguments for and these are some arguments against, and so I only partly agree / disagree.*** Or you can say: ***There are good arguments on both sides, but on the whole I prefer the***

arguments for / against. (Of course you would not use these actual words. They only summarise the possible underlying meanings in your essay.)

Remember, you are not being examined on your opinions, but only on how well you can express and support some intelligent ideas, whether they are your own or not.

1.2 Key terms

This is usually the easiest part of the essay to deal with. Normally the key words deal with a familiar topic, such as the Internet, or television, or technology in general. This is because the examiners are not testing you for your knowledge, but rather for your ability to write well. Therefore the topics chosen will be about concepts and issues that they expect every educated person to know something about. Common topics include:

Education
The environment
Information Technology
The media
Advertising / consumer issues
Social problems
Health
Lifestyles (including life in cities, traffic problems, quality of life)
Culture and society (music, art, literature, television etc.)
Foreign languages and travel
Sport
Scientific research (including genetic engineering, space travel)
Ethical issues (right and wrong behaviour such as the treatment of animals, law enforcement etc.)

Try to think of other topics that you know have been used in previous examinations, or that you think might occur.

You can find sample questions on all of these topics in Appendix A.

In order to be prepared with ideas on such key concepts, it is necessary to keep up to date with the major issues being discussed in the world. The editorial pages of newspapers and news magazines are important sources of such information, as are current affairs radio and television programs.

2. Analysing the Question

Understanding the question means more than understanding the instructions or the words of the question. It means recognising the **focus** of the question, and knowing what **approach** you should take to the topic.

This is, in some ways, the most important aspect of writing the essay, and requires the most thought. You should therefore be prepared to spend at least 3 minutes thinking about what approach to take to the question.

The handbook, you remember, explains that

> **Candidates are assessed on their ability to:**
> - **present the solution to a problem**
> - **present and justify an opinion**
> - **compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications**
> - **evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence or an argument.**

You will therefore need to decide which of these approaches is the one required for any particular question. You will also need to know when and how much to use **definitions** and **examples.**

In this section we will deal with the following features of a discussion or argument essay:

The Focus
The Context
Definitions
Examples

2.1 Finding the Focus

It is very important to look at the actual question words very closely. Students sometimes jump to conclusions about what they should write by just looking at the topic, and not at the focus of the topic. Consider the following questions:

a) Many people believe that the Internet is the most revolutionary new invention of the last century. Do you agree?

b) The Internet has revolutionised the modern world, but many people argue that it has also created new problems and inequalities. What is your opinion?

c) The Internet could revolutionise the world in future, if everyone could have easy access to all the information that is available on the World Wide Web. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

In each of the above the topic is the Internet and its revolutionary role in the world. So you must have a basic idea about what the Internet involves and think about what *revolutionise* means, i.e. make *fundamental changes.* However, each one also raises a different question and must be answered differently. It is necessary to look at the remaining words carefully to see what is required:

a) is the most revolutionary new invention of the last century.
b) has revolutionised the modern world, but it has also created new problems and inequalities.
c) could revolutionise the world in future, if everyone could have easy access to all the information that is available on the World Wide Web.

You can see that a) involves comparing the Internet with other inventions, and arguing that it is, or is not, the most revolutionary. On the other hand b) expects you to accept that it **is** revolutionary, and to consider both its benefits and the problems it has created. Finally c) wants you to speculate about the future, and to consider how much you believe the future benefits will change the world.

2.2 Understanding the Context

Remember that the IELTS Handbook says that the topics are ***of general interest and it makes no difference what subjects candidates study.*** It goes on to say that ***The issues raised are interesting, suitable for and easily understood by candidates entering postgraduate or undergraduate studies.***

The question is always based on an ***issue,*** or a ***problem*** which you are asked to analyse and present an opinion on. If something is considered a problem or an issue, it means that reasonable people must have conflicting opinions on the topic. You would not, for example, expect a question like this: ***Some people consider that murder is wrong. To what extent do you agree?*** since there is not much to be said in favour of murder. In other words, it is not just **some** people who think that murder is wrong, but basically **everybody.** It is not an issue. However, look at this question: ***Some people think that murderers should be executed. To what extent do you agree?*** Here the question is about **what to do about murder,** and that is very controversial! There are very strong opinions about this on both sides and you need to be aware of these to deal with such a topic. (In fact it is unlikely that IELTS will present you with very political or emotional issues like this.)

You therefore need to think, before you plan your own answer, why the question is considered to be an issue or a problem by the examiners. What are the different

opinions that might exist on the topic? What is the **context** in which this topic is controversial? That is to say, who are the people who are concerned about it and why?

It is also necessary to interpret the underlying meaning of a question. Sometimes the wording can be quite different between two questions, but the underlying concepts are the same because of the context.

TASK 1

In the following questions the wording is different but the underlying meaning is sometimes the same. Test your ability to interpret topics by identifying which of the following basically ask the same question. (In each case the statement would be followed by a question asking for your opinion.)

a) Tertiary education is of greater benefit to the individual receiving it than to the society as a whole. It is therefore not desirable for governments to spend the taxpayers' money on supporting students just so that they can earn more money in future.

b) Parents have a greater influence on their children's future success than schools do. Governments should therefore provide 'parent training courses' rather than 'teacher training courses'.

c) Free tertiary education is essential for every country since tertiary graduates are the only qualified and educated people that can help countries to progress in the modern world.

d) Education is the most important source of children's development. No matter what their background, if children have good schools and teachers they can progress. Governments should therefore put their major resources into school education.

e) Modern science and technology can solve evironmental problems, such as pollution and global warming, if we apply enough resources to research.

f) People throughout the world are ignoring the dangers of environmental pollution and of global warming in the hope that science and technology can find solutions. This is not true. We all need to take responsibility for the damage we are causing, and must change our life-styles.

☛ *Answer Key*

TASK 2

Choose 3 questions from Appendix A and consider what the context might be for them: what kind of people might be most concerned about the issue, and for what reasons could these topics be considered problematic?

(Discuss in groups if you are in a class.)

2.3 Defining the Terms

Some books and teachers tell you that you must define the terms that you use so that the reader will understand you. This is sometimes true, but it is necessary to be sensible about it. For example, look again at two of the examples given in2.1:

a) Many people believe that the Internet is the most revolutionary new invention of the last century. To what extent do you agree?

b) The Internet has revolutionised the modern world, but it has also created new problems and inequalities. Do you agree?

Which of the following terms do you think need defining?

Internet; revolutionary / revolutionise; new invention; modern world; dangers; inequalities; easy access; World Wide Web.

The "educated reader" that the IELTS test asks you to write for can be assumed to understand these: *Internet; new invention; modern world; easy access; World Wide Web.*

However, the term ***revolutionary*** or ***revolutionise*** can be interpreted differently, and in fact you need to explain what you mean by it in question a) otherwise you cannot answer the question. However, that does not mean that you need to define the terms directly. You will need to give an **indirect** definition of the degree of change implied, by showing **how important** you think the changes are that have been produced by the Internet, and whether these changes are more important and dramatic than other changes.

For question b) it is probably not necessary to concern yourself with this term, because you need to focus on the ***problems*** and ***inequalities,*** rather than on the degree of change. In this case you would be dealing with indirect definitions of these two concepts. (See 4.2 on p.20, for a discussion on **evaluation** in definitions.)

Now consider again the first sample topic given in this book, and compare it with the sample given in the IELTS Handbook:

> ***We live in a technological age. However, technology cannot solve all the world's problems. Therefore some people argue that we need to place less emphasis on technological solutions and more on other values.***

Now look at the sample topic given in the IELTS Handbook:

> Present a written argument or case to an educated reader with no specialist knowledge of the following topic:
>
> ***It is inevitable that as technology develops traditional cultures must be lost. Technology and tradition are incompatible — you cannot have both together.***
>
> You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience to support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.

Do the two topics ask the same question or not? Both are about technology, and in both cases technology is contrasted with something else. The focus in the first question is on contrasting technology with *other values* while in the second question it is contrasted with *traditional culture.* Whether you treat these questions as basically the same or not depends on your definition of ***tradition*** and of ***other values.*** Both are very broad terms, and can be interpreted in different ways, and here it is important to take time to consider what they mean to the average educated reader, and what they mean to you. If you think of ***traditional culture*** as dealing only with material objects, such as food and clothing, then you will discuss this in one way. If you also include social activities such as music and dance and theatre, then you may give a different answer. And if you include concepts such as religion and social behaviour, then you will be able to consider both questions as basically dealing with the same concepts, since other values in this case would be included in ***traditional culture.***

It is up to you to decide how broadly you want to consider the definition of *traditional culture,* but you must make your concept clear to your reader. In the same way, if you have the first question to deal with, you must indicate what you mean by *other values.*

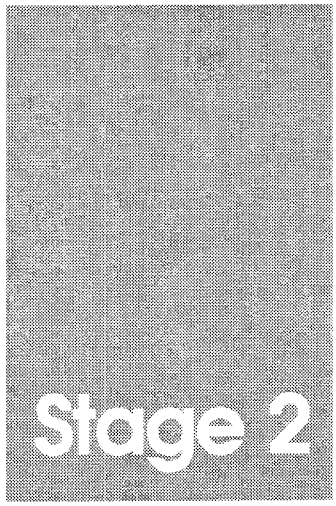
It is not necessary to give a formal definition, which is very difficult to do. In other words, you do not need to write: ***Traditional culture can be defined as.....*** Instead you can write something like: ***By traditional culture I mean not only the things that people make, like hand-woven cloth or houses, but also their ceremonies and performances, such as music and dance.*** In other words, you can give examples to help you to define.

What about the terms ***technology*** and ***technological age?*** Do they need defining? Not really — again it would be enough to give examples.

TASK 3

Look at the above two questions again and think about their *focus.* If you decide to define *traditional culture* more or less in the same way as *other values* could you write basically the same essay for both?

Time: It is worth spending enough time on stage 1 to ensure that your essay answers the question as it was intended by the examiners. If you spend 2 or 3 minutes thinking about the topic, it may seem like a long time during an exam, but it is time well spent if it helps you to write confidently and appropriately.



Selecting and Presenting Ideas

3. Finding Ideas

In an essay of 250 words, to be written in 40 minutes, you cannot be too ambitious about what you write. Some students make the mistake of trying to express very deep ideas and they never get past writing an introduction to what would be a long essay if there was time. On the other hand, if you do not have any specific ideas at all you may find yourself saying only one thing over and over again in several different ways. This is not the way to get a good score. Look at the following example:

> *The Internet has provided great benefits to modern society because it has helped everyone in their work. It makes everything easier. It has helped all sectors of society. Without the Internet, everything is much more difficult and takes a long time. But since we have the Internet every kind of work is much easier to do. Therefore the Internet has provided great benefits to everyone.*

This little "essay" says almost nothing. There is virtually no information and there are no ideas. If someone whose English is not very accurate writes like this, the reader has no ideas to think about and will only notice the grammatical and vocabulary mistakes.

Generally what you need is to have a basic proposition statement (e.g. one that answers the question ***to what extent*** by indicating ***a great deal, a little, partly*** (see above) plus about three points or examples to support your argument.

Three is a good number (although it can be less or more), since that gives you a 5 paragraph essay, which is about the right length:

Paragraph	1	Introduction
	2	Supporting point
	3	Supporting point
	4	Supporting point
	5	Conclusion

The easiest way to find and organise ideas is to brainstorm.

3.1 Brainstorming

In order to organise your ideas for a topic, it is first of all necessary to pin them down. Most students find that the best way to deal with this is to **brainstorm** their ideas first. This simply means jotting down any concepts that come into your head associated with the given topic, in note form, and in random order (i.e. in any order in which they occur to you).

Let us look at a simple example. The question may be:

> ***The Internet has revolutionised the modern world, but it has also created new problems and inequalities. Do you agree?***

We need to find ideas for both parts of the question –~~t~~he revolutionising effect of the Internet, and also its problems. We might come up with the following:

banking **online shopping** **email** **chat-rooms**

distance education **hacking** **information for research**

airline bookings **concert / theatre bookings** **pornography**

information for research **business communication**

sharing information: for police etc. / and for terrorists **viruses**

poor people have no access / left out

TASK 4

Write a brainstormed list of ideas relating to the topic:

Children spend far too much time in front of television and computer screens. Their time should be strictly controlled.

Discuss your ideas with someone else. You can also practise brainstorming with other topics from the list provided in the appendix. The more you practise, the easier it will be for you to think of ideas quickly during the test.

☛ *Answer Key*

3.2 Finding More Ideas

If you are having difficulties thinking up ideas at the right level of generalisation (see p.26 for a discussion about this), then a good technique is to think of very specific, concrete examples, and then try to find a higher level of abstraction that the examples belong to. Let me explain this with a simple illustration. Imagine that you are asked to write about this: *The importance of animals to people is not always recognised. We should pay more attention to how we look after and protect animals.* First you need to think about how important animals are to people. Begin by thinking of specific animals –~~a~~ny animals, including insects:

cow **cat** **lion**

mosquito **sheep** **dog**

kangaroo **butterfly**

Now organise these under a higher level of classification, e.g.

DOMESTIC ANIMALS		WILD ANIMALS	INSECTS
cow	cat	lion	mosquito
dog	sheep	kangaroo	butterfly

Think again, and come up with a sub-division of domestic animals:

ANIMALS WHOSE PRODUCTS WE USE	PETS
cow	dog
sheep	cat

Under insects we have harmful ones –~~m~~osquitoes, and useful ones — butterflies, which help to pollinate plants.

Now we can go back to our topic, the importance of animals to people, and we can say:

1) some animals are important to us directly because we use their products (e.g. cows, sheep, goats etc.)
2) some animals give us pleasure as pets (dogs, cats, birds etc.)
3) some animals help us indirectly e.g. by pollinating plants (butterflies, bees etc.)
4) some animals are just interesting and attract tourists (lions, kangaroos etc.)

And if, after thinking all that in our brainstorming and classifying, we suddenly think of horses, we may add the category of ***animals that work for us*** (and then remember water buffaloes, donkeys, camels etc.). In your essay you will then write about these categories of animals, rather than about individual species.

This is a simple example, but the same principle can be applied to many topics and it should help to provide ideas for you to write about.

TASK 5

Practise brainstorming concrete ideas and then classifying them under abstract headings as in the above example with the following topics:

a) People should not work too hard — they should remember the importance of leisure activities.

b) Education is the most important possession a person can have.

c) City life is too stressful.

☛ *Answer Key*

3.3 Using Examples

In all essays you must give specific points to support your argument. Sometimes a topic will be quite abstract and it is important to realise that you need to use **examples** to support your point of view — and to make sure that you have enough to say! The IELTS examination question itself specifies that **You should use your own ideas, knowledge and experience to support your arguments with examples and relevant evidence.**
Look at this topic:

> ***Young people are said to have lost many of the traditional values of the older generation. This does not matter, because the old values have no relevance in the modern world. We need to develop a whole new set of values. Do you support this statement?***

Many students make the mistake of trying to write only in general statements about a topic like this. That is difficult to do, because you need very abstract, philosophical language to do it well. It is much better to think of specific examples of values and to use two or three of these to illustrate and support your point of view.

3.4 The "What if Not" Situation

It can happen that you are faced with a question that you have never thought about at all, and where it is difficult to think of concrete examples. Remember, however, that the examiners select topics which have been considered controversial by many people and that there is always a social context for these questions. Imagine, for example, that you get a question about whether you think the government should fund more research into the causes of cancer. All you know is that cancer is dangerous and kills many people. How are you going to write at least 250 words on this question?

The first step is to think about **why** anyone would suggest this question. There are two components to the question: a) the problem of cancer and b) the question of funding for research — who should do it? It may be very difficult for you to say anything sensible in answer to the first question if you do not know any facts about cancer.

However, the second question should give you some ideas to work with. Even if you know nothing about cancer research you can think about the ***'what if not?'*** situation. That is to say: ***What if the government does not fund this research?*** Who should fund it? Should medical research be conducted by governments or by private institutions? If it is funded by private institutions, who pays and why?

Or perhaps no one will pay, and the research will not be done. On the other hand, if the government does fund this research, from what budget is it to come? (Do not assume that governments have an endless supply of money, as students often do in their essays!) If the government does not fund this research, can it use the same money for more useful medical work, such as health education to prevent common diseases?

If you follow this line of thinking you will be able to write a great deal, without having to know very much about cancer or cancer research, because basically the question is about **money:** government as against private spending on health, or the priorities in health spending in cases where funds are limited.

These kinds of ideas can also be brainstormed by jotting down notes on the question part of your paper. The examiner will not look at any notes you make.

3.5 Looking at the Other Side

Remember that if you are presenting an argument it is not necessary to present only the points that support your side of the argument. In fact, if you want to be convincing and to give a balanced statement, you need to look at what the supporters of the other side are likely to say, and to give a response to that. This will also give you many more ideas to write about.

For example, look at this topic:

> ***In every city the car is king of the road. Cars cause death and injury and air pollution and they make life dangerous for others. It is time to reduce the number of cars in our cities and to encourage other means of transport.***

There are already four arguments given to **support** the statement. To these you could add traffic congestion, roads destroying the landscape and making it unsafe for children to play outside their houses etc. Now what are the **counter-arguments?** You could suggest that strict speed limits can be implemented, that car engines are already causing less pollution than before and that research is likely to produce clean fuels in the near future, and that special walking paths and bicycle paths are already in use in some countries.

TASK 6

Make up a list of arguments that *support the use of the car,* and then try to find *counter-arguments* against these. Be careful to make sure that the counter-arguments do not introduce *different* arguments — they must present *directly* opposing arguments to the ones given.

☛ *Answer Key*

4. Selecting Ideas

There are a number of concepts that you must be clear about because they are involved in every kind of writing that you will do. You must be aware of the fact that you will nearly always be dealing with **problems and solutions,** that above all you are **evaluating** ideas and solutions as you write, and that you must select ideas that are **relevant,** that are at the **right level of generalisation,** and that are **ranked logically** for the topic that you are writing about. We will look at all these issues now, and then go on to discuss typical **organisation patterns** in the next section.

4.1 Solutions to Problems

Candidates are assessed on their ability to present the solution to a problem, the IELTS Handbook states. In fact, every topic is really a problem. If it were not a problem, it would not be worth talking about. So, for example, you might be asked to consider this topic:

> ***Most cities suffer from traffic congestion. What do you think should be done about it?***

To deal with a question that asks you directly to think of a solution, you should use the brainstorming process (see 3.1). Mostly, however, you will be offered some suggested solutions, and will be asked to consider them.

There are a number of ways of considering possible solutions to problems. In every case, you will need to use **evaluation.** That is, you will need to evaluate how good the possible solutions are likely to be. In the next section (**Organising Ideas**) we will look at typical organisation patterns for dealing with solutions to problem, but first we must discuss the most important aspect of all your writing:

4.2 Evaluation

Whatever the task, whether it is problem-solving, looking at effects or consequences, defending an opinion, comparing and contrasting evidence or ideas, you will need to evaluate.

Every essay will involve an evaluation of ideas. That simply means that you need to say whether an idea or concept is good or bad, or better or worse than another one. (See **Stage 3** for the language required.)

In some cases the question involves a **definition** which is an **evaluation.** In other words, the key terms of the question involve an evaluation. For example, look at this topic:

> ***Modern technology has increased our material wealth but has decreased our personal happiness. To what extent do you agree?***

To be able to discuss this you need to give at least an indirect definition of what you mean by ***happiness.*** This cannot be defined in any objective way –~~it~~ is a concept that involves values.

[**See also 5.3 Comparisons**]

TASK 7

Look at the following topics and decide which terms require an evaluation:

a) Television does more harm than good, according to many critics. Do you agree with this?

b) It is often claimed that television and films encourage violence. What is your opinion?

c) Computers have improved the quality of our lives. Do you agree?

d) People in modern cities live under too much stress and something should be done about it. Do you agree?

e) Too much money is spent on sport and not enough on serious culture such as music and art. This is making our society shallow.

☛ *Answer Key*

Students often make the mistake of overstating their argument. An evaluation should be **realistic** and **reasonable,** not exaggerated, or over-idealistic, or based on over-generalisations. (See 4.7 below.)

Selecting ideas involves ensuring that your points are **relevant** and at the right level of generalisation. Before we can select the most relevant and appropriate points, we need to do a preliminary organisation of ideas, as shown below.

4.3 Classification of Ideas

After brainstorming, and having looked at the topic again, your next step is to organise the ideas that you have jotted down. This involves classifying your ideas into logical categories, so that you can produce well-organised paragraphs. Generally, more than one system of classification is possible but there is usually one very obvious pattern. Let us look at the examples we used before and find a simple pattern. What follows is just an example of how you might think about classifying your ideas. It is there as a general guideline, not as a model to be copied directly in any way.

In 3.1 we looked at this question:

> ***The Internet has revolutionised the modern world, but it has also created new problems and inequalities. Do you agree?***

We then brainstormed the following ideas:

banking **online shopping** **email** **chat-rooms**

distance education **hacking** **information for research**

airline bookings **concert / theatre bookings** **pornography**

information for research **business communication**

sharing information: for police etc. and for terrorists **viruses**

poor people have no access / left out

These ideas can be classified under the two categories of **positive** and **negative** effects:

POSITIVE

banking; online shopping; distance education; airline bookings; concert / theatre bookings; business communications; email; information for research; chat-rooms; police etc. sharing information

NEGATIVE

hacking; pornography; terrorists sharing information; poor people have no access / left out

However, this is still not a satisfactory classification to work with. We can also classify the activities according to 3 different types: **business activities; educational / research activities; communication,** and then we can end up with this kind of organisation:

BUSINESS ACTIVITIES	INFORMATION / RESEARCH	COMMUNICATION
Positive:	**Positive:**	**Positive:**
online banking	distance education	business communication
online shopping	info. for research	email
airline bookings		sharing info
concert bookings		chat-rooms
theatre bookings		police sharing info
Negative:	**Negative:**	**Negative:**
hackers	no access for poor people	terrorists sharing info
pornography		

Once you have got this level of classification, it is easy to write your essay systematically. You may not use all of the ideas, but you have a clear paragraph structure for your essay to follow, and you can decide next how much detail to put into in each category.

4.4 Types of classification

As we said before (4.2), because the essay topic requires you to express an opinion, you will need to **evaluate** something. In order to do that you will frequently find yourself with a classification as above, into **positive** and **negative** features.

Another way of thinking about such topics is that you have to make a **comparison.** You are **comparing the positive features with the negative ones.**

For example:

> ***'Money cannot buy happiness' it is often claimed. But with money you can buy most of the things that are necessary for happiness: good food; accommodation etc. No wonder most people want to make as much money as possible. Do you agree or disagree?***

Sometimes you may be asked to **speculate** or **suggest alternatives** to an existing situation. In that case you will be comparing the situation that exists in the world with what some people think **should** exist. [See 5.3 Comparisons]

For example:

> ***We are surrounded by advertising. Some people think that this is good because it gives us a choice as consumers, but others argue that it makes people selfish and greedy for more and more goods. Do you think there should be less advertising?***

Some topics only require you to consider the **consequences** of something, i.e. a **cause-effect** relationship, as well as giving an evaluation of the effects. [**See 5.2 Consequences**] In each of these cases you still need to **classify** the ideas that you have according to the **type of features** involved, as we did above.

We will deal with each of these types of questions more later. Now try your skill at classifying features.

TASK 8

Consider the following topic and then look at the brainstormed ideas which follow and organise them according to both cause and effect and the type of features involved:

Industrialisation is leading to the destruction of the earth as a home for humans and animals. To what extent do you agree that this is true?

factories **air pollution** **waste disposal** **cars**

rubbish — plastic etc. **water pollution** **fish dying**

deforestation **animals endangered** **lack of fresh water**

☛ *Answer Key*

TASK 9

Do the same with the following, but use an evaluation classification scheme, as well as appropriate categories of features (as in the example in 4.3):

Many modern children spend a great deal of time sitting in front of a television or computer screen. This is extremely harmful for their development. Therefore parents should strictly limit the time that children spend this way. Do you agree?

entertainment **educational information** **news** **films**

general knowledge **music** **sport** **wastes time**

communication through computer **homework not done**

not enough exercise: harms bodies **harms eyes** **no socialising / friends**

advertising makes people buy unnecessary things

☛ *Answer Key*

4.5 Selecting Relevant Ideas

After brainstorming and while classifying your ideas, it is necessary to eliminate any points that are not relevant. At this point it is useful to look at the question again, to make sure that the ideas that you choose are not only on the topic, but also relevant to the question.

TASK 10

Imagine that for the above question the following list of points have been brainstormed for the negative aspect of TV and computer use:

bad for the eyes **children may forget to eat** **don't do homework**

waste time **no physical exercise** **not enough sleep**

computer games are expensive **children don't learn to be creative**

arguments in the family about what to watch

Which of the above points would you say are irrelevant to answering the question?

☛ *Answer Key*

4.6 Level of Generalisation

One basis on which to select relevant ideas is to ensure that you choose points at the right **level of generalisation.** In other words, it is necessary to eliminate small, trivial points or examples, and at the same time not to try to tackle concepts that are too broad for such a short essay.

For example, if you were asked to write on the topic:

> ***The environment is one of the most important issues in the world today, but governments are not doing enough about it. To what extent do you think that individuals can help to protect the environment?***

you might think of the following ideas:

recycling waste material **not throwing rubbish around**

saving electricity **educational campaigns for the public**

keeping the yard of your house clean **reducing use of packaging**

restricting use of water **using more public transport**

If you look at the question again you will see that, on the one hand ***educational campaigns for the public*** is too broad a concept ~~it~~ is not something that **individuals** can normally undertake, while on the other hand ***keeping the yard of your house clean*** is too trivial. That is to say, it is not something that is going to help to protect the environment in general, it is simply something that everyone should do anyway. The other points are at the right level of generalisation, and you would need to work with these, by classifying and ranking them. (See 4.3 and 5.1.)

Now test yourself on the following:

TASK 11

Consider this topic:

> *'Money cannot buy happiness' it is often claimed. But with money you can buy most of the things that are necessary for happiness: good food, accommodation etc. No wonder that most people want to make as much money as possible. Do you agree or disagree?*

Here are some brainstormed ideas for this topic:

FOR

healthy food is expensive — good house in good environment

good entertainment — good doctors — can give money to poor people

transport: own car — own aeroplane — travel

set up big project like art gallery or sports stadium for your city

AGAINST

could gamble money away — high taxes

children could argue about inheritance — can't buy friends

definition of 'happiness': spirituality — can't buy love

Which of the above points would you eliminate because they are too broad or too specific or too far off the main idea to be relevant?

☛ *Answer Key*

4.7 Overgeneralisations and Exaggeration

Generalisations are necessary. We cannot make any sensible conclusions about anything without generalising from specific examples. Especially in your introduction, topic sentences and conclusion (See Stage 3) you will need to generalise. However, there is a danger of **over-generalisation.** Over-generalisations (or *sweeping generalisations* as they are also called) do not help your argument, because they give the impression that you are not very thoughtful. Consider these examples:

i) Everybody uses the Internet nowadays.
ii) No-one can run a business without information technology.
iii) Any business can be successful if it uses modern information technology.

These are clearly over-generalisations or exaggerations, and would not help your argument. An essay is not a political speech or a form of advertising!

TASK 12

Which of the following are reasonable evaluations and which are over-generalisations or exaggerations? Put a mark against any of the following which are not reasonable statements. You may find it easier to discuss this with someone.

1. *Television has a terrible effect on young minds.*
2. *The destruction of our environment is the most serious issue we face, because without enough clean air and water we cannot live.*
3. *Unless governments strictly control the use of the Internet world terrorism will destroy us all.*
4. *Examinations can lead to high levels of stress and even suicide in students.*
5. *Industry causes most pollution and therefore needs to be made responsible for preventing it.*
6. *Improved public transport is a much better solution to traffic problems than building more roads.*
7. *If the government provides better public transport there will be no more traffic congestion in our cities.*
8. *People who claim that nuclear energy is clean are ignoring the dangers of nuclear accidents. Radiation is not 'clean'.*

9. *Nuclear energy is the only possible solution to our energy needs in the future.*
10. *If everyone learns to speak English then all the people in the world will be able to understand each other and then we can live in peace with each other.*

☛ *Answer Key*

TASK 13

Read the following essays and think about which one is more satisfactory. Pay special attention to generalisations and exaggeration.

A.

Modern technology has improved the world in three very important ways. It has given people more time, it has saved enormous amounts of human energy, and it has made it possible for everyone to communicate with each other easily.

Time and effort have been saved in the workplace and in the home. In manufacturing, for example, it is no longer necessary to spend hours planning and designing products because computers can do this quickly. Farmers do not need to plant their harvest slowly by hand; they can use equipment like light aircraft for sowing seeds and large harvesting machines to do the work quickly. Housewives can spend more time with their friends, while the washing machine and the dishwasher wash the clothes and the dishes for them.

In the same way energy is saved. There is no need for hard physical work any more, because modern machines can do it all. Because of modern technology people can relax, where before they had to work very hard.

Another great improvement has been in communications. Because of communication systems such as telephones, fax machines, mobile phones, television etc., and the use of satellites, we can know what is happening at any time in all parts of the world. This leads to better understanding, so there is no need for wars, and countries can help each other. For example, if there is an earthquake in one country, people in other countries can find out about it immediately and send help to the victims.

For all these reasons the world is now a much better place than in earlier times, because of the advantages brought by modern technology.

B.

Everyone thinks that the world has been improved through modern technology, but this is not true because nowadays there are no more traditional skills and everybody is becoming the same, no matter what country they live in, and above all there are no more spiritual values left.

In the olden days, when people had to make their own buildings, and their own clothes, and their own entertainment, they had many traditional skills and values. Each area had its own style of architecture, for example, and people were proud of their craftsmanship. Now all houses are made of concrete and glass and steel and they all look the same, no matter where you are. All over the world people wear the same mass-produced clothes and they even watch the same mass-produced entertainment on their televisions sets. You can hear the same pop songs in every country in the world, and local people no longer produce their own traditional cultural forms of music and dance. Everyone does whatever the latest dance fashion is.

This means that people all over the world are becoming the same. Everybody sees the same films and hears the same music and so they all start to think the same. All they want is more of the same consumer goods, no matter where they live. This means that the world is losing its spiritual values as well as its diversity of culture. In the end, no-one will have any new or individual ideas because modern communication techniques, such as satellite television and the Internet, mean that we are all brainwashed in the same way by the big multi-national owners of the mass media. In other words, they can control us.

Modern technology makes people lazy and greedy for more consumer goods, and so they lose their spiritual values. They become selfish and lose their religion and do not even care about the members of their own families. They put their small children into nurseries, their sick people into hospitals and their old people into old people's homes and then they forget about them. Modern technology can look after them, they think.

It is time we stopped wanting more modern technology and went back to traditional values.

☛ *Answer Key*

5. Organising Ideas

5.1 Ranking Ideas

Once you have selected your points, you need to decide **in what order** to present them. This is important to show that you are in control of your material, and that you understand the relative importance of each of the points you are making. In this section we will deal with different patterns of organisation, but first of all you need to be aware of the need to rank ideas according to one of the following methods:

a) from **the most important** to the least important
b) from **the most common** to the least common
c) from **the most general** to the least general
d) from **the earlier** to the later (chronological order).

There are other systems possible, but these are the most obvious ones.

There are a number of common organisational patterns that you will find: **cause and effect (consequences), comparisons, alternatives,** and **speculation,** in addition to the **problem-solution** and **evaluation** schemas that we have already discussed.

5.2 Consequences

The most obvious way of discussing a problem, in any situation, not just essays, is to look at the **causes of** (or **reasons for**) the existence of the problem, and then to consider what **consequences** or **results** (or **effects**) there might be if certain solutions are tried. For example, look at this statement:

> ***Parents should control the amount of time that children spend in front of television or computer screens.***

This is a suggested solution to a problem and you would be expected to give your opinion on it. To do so you would need to a) discuss the consequences of too much time being spent in this way by children and b) discuss the consequences of parents trying to control it.

In many cases a term meaning **cause** or **effect or result** is given in the topic itself. For example there might be this statement: ***Modernisation is leading to the destruction of the natural environment.*** In this case you will need to think of examples, as discussed above.
Often you will be given more details in the question itself. Here is an example:

> ***At present we rely on oil for most of our energy needs. However, oil is a fossil fuel and causes air pollution, and it will eventually run out. Nuclear energy is the only practical and clean source of energy for the world. Do you agree?***

Here you are given two causes and two effects for oil: a) burning a fossil fuel causes air pollution, and b) fossil fuels are finite and as a result there will be none left one day. So you already have two negative effects to think about: pollution and lack of energy. Now you must consider the consequences of using nuclear energy. The positive consequences are already implied: it does not cause air pollution and it will not run out. But are there other negative consequences? Obviously, or we would all be using it. So, what are they? Once you have thought of these you will have plenty to write about. That does not mean that you have to oppose the question. You can list the benefits of nuclear energy just mentioned, and you can then identify the negative consequences and explain that these can be solved, or that they are not as serious as the negative consequences of using oil. Remember, it is your choice, whether you support or oppose the statement, totally or partly, but even if you support it you should not ignore the problems. Apart from anything else, you would not have very much to write about if you ignore the problems on both sides. [See 3.5]

Remember that whatever effects or consequences you decide to write about, they must be relevant, of the right level of generalisation, and ranked according to how significant they are.

TASK 14

Think of as many negative consequences of using nuclear energy as you can.

☛ *Answer Key*

5.3 Comparisons

The IELTS Handbook asks you to be able to **compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications.**

In fact, if you think about it you will see that **evaluation** is a kind of comparison, or that comparison and contrast is a kind of evaluation. When you evaluate something, as we said before, you are comparing the **situation as it is** with an **ideal situation.** At the same time, when you are comparing or contrasting two things you are evaluating them against some other set of criteria. For example, in the above topic we are asked to compare oil and atomic energy as sources of energy for our use. To do that we must have a set of standards or criteria to evaluate them against. What could these be? Look at this analysis:

A perfect source of energy would fulfil the following criteria:

a) be cheap to produce
b) be plentiful
c) be easy to use
d) be clean to use
e) be safe to use
f) never run out

Now if we want to compare oil and nuclear energy we simply match each of these against the criteria, and we find that oil is better than nuclear energy in a), c), e), while nuclear energy is better in the other criteria. However, that is not enough. We also need to **rank** the criteria according to importance. In other words, we may agree that nuclear energy is cleaner to use than oil, but it is much less safe, and for many people the safety factor is far more important than the problem of air pollution. Besides, as we saw above, it is possible to provide counter-arguments, such as that technology can make oil cleaner, but it can never make radio-activity safer. So, at each step of the way you can consider additional criteria for evaluation. Of course there is no time to go into a subject as deeply as this in a test essay, and there is no need to, but it is important to be aware of how any kind of analytical thinking will always involve some form of evaluation and comparison. The more carefully and clearly you can identify the criteria by which you judge or evaluate or compare something, the better your thinking and your judgements will be.

5.4 Alternatives

Sometimes you have to think of **alternatives** to an existing situation. Look at this topic again for example:

> ***In every city the car is king of the road. Cars cause death and injury and air pollution, and make life difficult and dangerous for others. It is time to reduce the number of cars in our cities and to encourage other means of transport. Do you agree with this opinion?***

Here you need to look at alternative means of transport, and evaluate these. Be careful to be realistic in your discussion of the alternatives. Considering other forms of transport is very like looking at the consequences of a policy and, as we said above, it is necessary to look at the situation honestly, and to acknowledge the problems that exist on both sides of the argument. Students who make exaggerated claims are not writing good essays.

TASK 15

Which of the following alternative means of transport would be worth writing about in an essay that answers the above question?

bicycles **moving footpaths** **trams** **buses**

underground trains **elevated trains / monorails** **helicopters**

motorbikes **motorised three-wheelers**

5.5 Speculation

In some cases you may be asked to think about an alternative that does not exist, i.e. to **speculate** about what **might be.** Here is an example of a topic like that:

> ***As there is increasing unemployment in the world, while at the same time those who have jobs are working harder and harder, it would be better to have a four-day working week for everyone, and so to create more jobs. What is your opinion about this suggestion?***

Again, you must think about the possible **consequences** of this suggestion, and you must **evaluate** these against the criteria that you think apply when talking about work and leisure. Once again, you should try to be realistic, and not exaggerate with your suggestions.

TASK 16

Study the following list of points that have been brainstormed in relation to the topic given above. First, decide which points should be eliminated because they are irrelevant, or exaggerated, and then classify the remaining points under suitable headings. Finally, rank the points in order of importance.

1. *Everyone would earn less money - would not have enough to live on.*

2. *People earning less money would spend less, and this would reduce demand for goods and services and make the economy shrink.*

3. *More time away from work means more time for the family and friends.*

4. *More free time means more opportunity to do things like sport, art, music.*

5. *More free time means people are more bored — more drinking and gambling.*

6. *Employers would have problems training and managing and paying more people.*

7. *What about teachers? Would schools only operate on 4 days too, or would some teachers only work 1 day a week?*

8. *If someone owns their own small business and has to work 6 or 7 days it is not fair for others to be working only 4 days.*

9. *The unemployed are usually not qualified people, so they could not fill the jobs anyway that would be created.*

10. *Imagine that you do a job for 4 days and then someone else comes and does it after you and they do not know what you have in mind and they spoil it all.*

☛ *Answer Key*

TASK 17

Finally, look at the following topics and decide which type of organisation pattern is mainly required in each case: *comparison; consequences; evaluation; examples; speculation.*

1. *The environment is one of the most important issues in the world today, but governments are not doing enough about it. To what extent do you think that individuals can help to protect the environment*

2. *Most pollution, especially air and water pollution, is caused by industry. If we want to protect the environment we should make factories and other forms of industry pay for all the pollution that they cause. That is the only way to make sure that the owners will make a serious effort to reduce the pollution that they cause.*
   To what extent do you agree with this opinion?

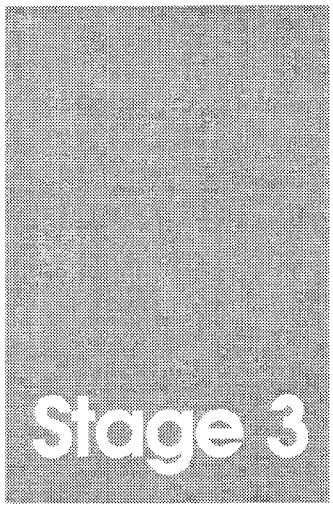
3. *To be successful in education it is more important to be a good student than to have good teachers.*
   Would you support this statement?

4. *The increasing role of English in the world today means that the learning of other languages is being neglected. This will have serious results for the continued use of these languages and their cultures.*
   What is your opinion on this statement?

5. *Tobacco and alcohol are drugs that cause addiction and health problems Should they be made illegal, like other drugs? Or should all drugs be legalised?*
   What do you think about these ideas?

6. *We know that many kinds of animals feel pain and emotional suffering just as humans do. It is therefore necessary to support animal rights as well as human rights.*
   Do you agree?

☛ *Answer Key*



Writing

6. Using the Right Grammar, Vocabulary and Style

Now that you have selected and organised your content you can focus on the actual writing. This involves using the right grammar and vocabulary for each of the sections of the essay –that is, the introduction, body and conclusion –as well as making sure that the overall style is appropriate.

6.1 Grammar

No matter how good your ideas or your outlining skills are, if you do not have sufficient control of correct English you cannot communicate your brilliance. As we said at the beginning, the basic criterion for assessment is your command of English, not the contents. Grammar is the infrastructure of your writing, and if that is weak, then a clever superstructure of ideas will simply make the whole essay collapse.

The most important preparation you can make for your test essay, therefore, is to ensure that you have a good grasp of the essentials:

the tenses
the use of the passive
correct use of parts of speech
correct clause structure (with subjects and finite verbs)

Although many people worry about the correct use of the article and of prepositions, these are less important than the aspects mentioned above. They are more difficult to master and errors are less disturbing because they usually do not interfere with understanding of meaning. That does not mean that you should ignore them, but make sure you have your priorities right!

A sentence like this:

 # The develop of cheap alternative energy sources will probably be successed in future

is much worse than:

 # Development of cheap alternative energy source will probably succeed for the future.

(The correct sentence would of course be: *The development of a cheap alternative energy source will probably succeed in future.)*

TASK 18 DIAGNOSTIC GRAMMAR TEST

Try to identify the errors in the following text. The Answer Key will let you know which aspects of grammar you may need to study more.

1. *Computers are an essential part of our lives. Because all aspects of modern society are affected by them. Before we had computers all transactions involved storing and retrieving information were very time-consuming and labour-intensive.*
2. *The develop of personal computers in particular effect on people's lives because small businesses can easy afford them and this makes their work more efficiency.*
3. *Now anyone who study at university need to learn how to use computer. Most lecturer expect that essay are typed and in many subject calculation and other task must also be done by computer.*
4. *In recent years software packages became easier to use and so many people who think before that they are too old to learn had actually been able to learn to do simple word processing.*
5. *Schools as well as colleges are provided computer courses in developed countries, but it is needed a big investment for such equipment to make available to many students and most schools in developing countries cannot afford this.*
6. *We could not know what future developments there would be in this area but most people think that computers would be even more wide-spread in the coming years.*

☛ *Answer Key*

6.2 Vocabulary

While grammar is one leg, vocabulary is the second leg for your writing to stand on. But note that **simple, correct** English is better than experimenting with sophisticated vocabulary and getting it wrong! You may try out unfamiliar vocabulary if you have a helpful teacher, but not during a test! There are certain words and phrases that you can make a special point of learning carefully because they are likely to be used in most, if not all essays. Make sure that you have enough vocabulary for each of the common categories:

Evaluation (e.g. benefit, unsatisfactory)
Consequence, cause, reason (e.g. outcome, produce, explanation)
modifiers (e.g. significant, majority)
connectors (under these circumstances, moreover)
grouping nouns (aspect, factor, feature)

The best way to learn these is to look for examples in your reading and then copy them into your own personal vocabulary book under the appropriate headings. Be careful to copy **whole phrases,** not just single words, so that you learn the **correct use** of the expressions.

The correct use of a word involves knowing:

the exact meaning
the words that go with it
the grammatical features

For example:

cause and *reason* do not mean the same
reason is followed by *for,* while *cause* is followed by *of*
you *give* a reason, and you generally *show* a cause.
due to is a preposition, and is followed by a noun or gerund, not a noun clause.

In other words, vocabulary and grammar go together. It is not enough to understand the meaning of a word, approximately, when you are writing. It is essential to learn the accurate usage as well.

7. The Sections of the Essay

7.1 The introduction

The **purpose** of the introduction is to let the reader know

a) the topic
b) the aspect of the topic being dealt with
c) the stand (attitude) taken by the writer to the topic.

In other words, the introduction actually contains the conclusion!

For example, if the topic is:

> ***Many modern children spend too much time sitting in front of a television screen. This is extremely harmful to their development. Therefore parents should strictly limit the time that children spend in this way. Do you agree?***

you should let your reader know in the introduction whether your answer is yes, I agree, or no, I disagree. The rest of the essay then provides support for your argument. The **structure** of the introduction usually follows a common pattern. To introduce the topic and explain why it is worthwhile talking about, you will normally need a statement something like this:

> *Television is so common now that it is hard to imagine life without it.*

That is, the first sentence typically makes a general statement about a situation.

The next statement then narrows the topic down to a specific aspect that he writer will deal with. For example:

> *However, as many people have pointed out, most children spend too much time in front of the screen, and this is harmful.*

Note that the second statement often contains the word ***but*** or ***however,*** to show that the writer has something new or different to say. For example, if the first sentence is:

> *Many people complain that children spend a great proportion of their lives watching television.*

then the second statement would be more likely to present the opposite view, such as:

> *This may be true in some cases, but it is certainly not common enough to be a serious problem.*

It is, however, not always the case that the second statement contains a *but* or *however*. It may also support and strengthen the first statement.

Here are some examples:

> *Television has become so much a part of our lives that many people do not realise how many hours they actually spend watching it. In fact, it has been pointed out that most children watch far more television than is good for them.*

Here is another topic:

> ***The environment is one of the most important issues in the world today, but governments are not doing enough about it. To what extent do you think that individuals can help to protect the environment?***
>
> *People are gradually becoming aware of the fact that we are destroying our natural environment. We should realise that none of the other problems that we face are more important than this one, but clearly governments are not taking a lead in dealing with the issue. It is therefore up to individual citizens to do something about it.*

Note: In the above example the writer's conclusion is presented in the third sentence. A statement, in this context, is not the same as a sentence. That is to say, the writer's opinion is presented as the second statement, but not necessarily the second sentence. See the model essays in Appendix B for more examples.

WARNING: You must avoid repeating the exact words of the topic. If you repeat the words, you can gain no marks, since they are not your words. The examiner will simply ignore them. If you paraphrase, you are displaying your language skills.

Look again at the examples given above, and see how the first sentence in each case is a paraphrase of the topic as it is given.

TASK 19

The following are five introductions to the essay topic:

Modern technology has increased our material wealth, but not our happiness. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

However, the sentences have been jumbled. Find the first and second sentences which belong together in each case, to make five different introductions.

1. *Every country in the world is aiming for technological development.*

2. *The most important thing for happiness, however, is not possessions, but relationships.*

3. *For most people, technological development means an improvement in their life-style.*

4. *Their governments are not making their people more contented, however, as inequalities in society continue to grow.*

5. *Modern technology can provide enormous benefits in terms of material goods.*

6. *It seems clear, however, that this is an old-fashioned view, and that technological inventions actually allow people to have more time and leisure to satisfy their spiritual needs.*

7. *Technology has brought many changes to people's lives, not all of which are beneficial.*

8. *Some people claim that modern technology is harming society's spiritual and traditional values.*

9. *In fact, in many cases people have suffered enormously because of these changes.*

10. *However, while some people enjoy an easier life, others are often made unemployed as a result of new technology, and most people now feel insecure and unhappy as a result.*

☛ *Answer Key*

TASK 20

Select the best pair of sentences from the following to introduce the topic:

The Internet has provided great benefits, but at the same time it has also created new problems and inequalities. Is it possible to control some of these problems?

a) Most people would like to have access to the Internet.

b) The Internet has changed our lives more than any other modern technology.

c) The Internet has given both advantages and disadvantages to our society.

d) The Internet is a relatively new phenomenon.

e) In fact, with the Internet it is possible to do many things.

f) However, the Internet can help terrorists to communicate with each other.

g) At the same time it has created an enormous gap between those who have access to it and those who do not.

h) On the other hand it has created some problems.

☛ *Answer Key*

7.1.1 Grammar and Vocabulary in the Introduction

The introduction will normally be in the present tense *(e.g. people **complain**),* or the present continuous *(people **are gradually becoming** aware),* or in the present perfect tense *(people **have pointed out**).*

After your introductory statement you need to connect the second statement (i.e. second or third etc. sentence) either by showing contrast, or by adding emphasis:

Contrast Connectors: ***but, however, nevertheless, by / in contrast, on the other hand, in spite of this, while, whereas, although.***

NOTE: IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO USE THESE CORRECTLY.

Note: It is best to avoid starting a sentence with But, since it is rather informal to do so. ***However*** is the most common and the most useful word. It can be used for almost every situation. Note, **however**, that it is often better to use it in the **second** position in the sentence. Avoid using **on the contrary** and take great care with other connectors.

TASK 21

Supply a suitable connector in the gaps in the following introductory sentences:

a) Many people believe that nuclear energy is clean. _____
it is potentially more dangerous than any other technology that we use.

b) The Internet has brought many opportunities to people. _____
it has also increased the gap between rich and poor people and societies.

c) We have clearly gained many benefits from modern technology. _____
it can be argued that happiness does not depend on material comforts.

☛ *Answer Key*

TASK 22

Write introductions for the following topics, remembering to:

a) write a general statement in your first sentence
b) indicate your own position or stand on the topic in the second or third sentence.
c) paraphrase the words of the topic.

1. ***It is generally agreed that the world is facing serious environmental problems of pollution, global warming and the loss of resources such as fresh water. Some people believe that these problems can be solved by technological inventions and developments, while others feel strongly that we can only solve these problems by consuming less, and living simpler life-styles. What is your opinion?***

2. ***Many people feel strongly that health services should be provided by the government and should be freely available. Others argue that only privatised health care can provide good quality health services. To what extent do you believe that health and medical services should be privatised?***

7.2 The Body

The body will typically consist of about three paragraphs, presenting points to support your argument. You will have worked out your ideas in the planning stage, when organising your brainstormed ideas. Now it is simply a matter of presenting one main point in each paragraph.

A paragraph is like a mini-essay, since it is also a **unit** of writing. That means that, like in an essay, you must let the reader know as soon as possible what your proposition or statement is, and then support it. This is usually done with a **topic sentence.** Let us look again at the classification in 4.3 of brainstormed ideas on the question about the Internet.

> ***The Internet has revolutionised the modern world, but it has also created new problems and inequalities. Do you agree?***

Our brainstorming produced the following ideas:

BUSINESS ACTIVITIES	INFORMATION / RESEARCH	COMMUNICATION
Positive:	**Positive:**	**Positive:**
online banking	distance education	business communication
online shopping	info. for research	email
airline bookings		sharing info
concert bookings		chat-rooms
theatre bookings		police sharing info
Negative:	**Negative:**	**Negative:**
hackers	no access for poor people	terrorists sharing info
pornography		

First of all, we will look at which of the points we may want to delete. We will want to keep the main categories: business activities, information / research (include education here, perhaps), and communication. Not all the details are going to be worth keeping, but at present we are only considering the topic sentences, so we can ignore that for now.

Next we need to **rank** the ideas in order of importance. Perhaps we can start with business activities, because they are the most widespread use of the Internet at present, and then go on to talk about education, which is very important, and finally discuss personal communication.

However, we also need to discuss the positive and negative aspects. At this stage we need to decide whether to start with our three categories, and list the positive and negative aspects within each, or to start with the positive aspects, listing all three categories in a row, and then to move on to the negative ones. Either organisation system is possible. Here is a suggestion about how to construct topic sentences for the first system:

> *There is no doubt that the Internet has brought about an almost unbelievable change in the way business and banking is conducted.*

Next, we must go on to the negative aspects, so our next paragraph could begin something like this:

> *However, since the Internet is not available to most people in developing countries, it is clear that the gap between the rich and the poor countries has actually widened enormously since online business and banking have been introduced.*

If we continue like this, we would end up with 6 paragraphs in the body (3 categories x positive and negative), which is too long for the test essay. So, to keep it shorter, and to have a little variety, you could introduce the positive and negative ideas together in the next paragraph's topic sentence, like this:

> *In education and research the situation is similar: the Internet has made revolutionary changes in these fields, but the lack of access for poor people and poor societies is creating serious inequalities.*

Notice how, if you have a point that appears twice in your lists, you can use it to link one paragraph to the next, as above *(widened gap –~~similar~~ –~~serious~~ inequalities).*

Finally, we need to mention communication in general, which is already covered by some of the above points, as well as personal communication. Again, we can link the concepts:

> *The Internet basically involves communication, not only in business and education, as mentioned above, but also for personal information exchange.*

There is , of course, an almost endless number of ways of introducing the same concepts at the beginning of each paragraph. The main points to remember are:

a) the introductory paragraph introduces the main idea of the essay, and the topic sentences introduce the main supporting ideas
b) the topic sentence introduces the main idea of the paragraph, and the following sentences provide supporting ideas for it.

7.2.1 Vocabulary in the Body

Connectors will occur throughout the body of your essay. The most common ones are those that are used for **listing,** and for **addition,** for **consequences** and for **emphasis.** The basic **listing** connectors are:

firstly; secondly; the third feature etc.; finally; in conclusion.

These are the most boring ones. Rather better are the ones that show **addition:**

both...and; also; not only....but also....; furthermore; moreover; in addition.

Note: Do not overuse these connectors. It is very boring to read one of these at the beginning of each sentence! Note also that it is better to put *also* in the second position in the sentence, not at the beginning.

The most common connectors showing **effects, results** or **consequences** are:

therefore; consequently; for this reason; as a result; because of this.

Note also: All of the above must start a new sentence –they cannot be used to join clauses. For example

#Not everyone has access to the Internet therefore it divides communities

is wrong. You can either use a semi-colon (;) or use ***and therefore.***

Connectors for **emphasis** are useful and include:

in fact; what is more; in particular.

When giving **examples** you can use:

for example; for instance; such as.

Be careful with the latter: *such as* can NOT begin a clause. It is a preposition, followed by a noun (or gerund). (And please never use *#such like,* which is not correct English!)

There are of course many other connectors. Make yourself familiar with the most useful ones and be careful to use them accurately or your logic will appear faulty.

7.3 The Conclusion

The conclusion need not be long. In fact, it can be as short as one sentence. A good conclusion will not be merely a repetition of the main topic statement of the essay, or of your proposition statement in the introduction, since that is rather boring to read and does not show your English skills. Nevertheless, it should contain some kind of a summary of the main argument or proposition of the essay. It is also a good idea to include a comment on the **implications** of your conclusion.

If, for instance, you make a **recommendation,** you can comment on what may happen if your recommendation is followed. For example, (for the topic that **children's viewing of television should be controlled):**

> *Therefore it is important to limit the amount of television that children watch, otherwise they will suffer educationally and socially as they grow up.*

Or: *Therefore, if children's television viewing is sensibly supervised it will allow them to enjoy certain programs as well as to develop the skills that they need.*

Note the **paraphrases** for the word *control.* As with the introduction, if you want to stay close to the topic statement it is desirable to attempt to paraphrase it. In some cases you can even avoid a paraphrase completely by summarising in a new way. For example:

> *Children do not always know what is best for them, and in this case, as in many other cases, the guidance of parents is essential if they are to grow up as well-balanced people.*

In some cases a conclusion may consider possible **future outcomes.** For example:

> *The Internet has already become widespread and almost indispensable, and it can be expected that in future access will become cheaper and easier for everyone in the world.*

Or: *Although atomic energy can never run out, unlike fossil fuels, it is clear that other, less dangerous sources of energy will need to be developed for future generations.*

7.3.1 Grammar and Vocabulary in the Conclusion

Make sure that you know how to use various terms expressing **implications** correctly. These include:

otherwise; in this case; under these circumstances

followed by the future tense.

You will also need the language of **speculation** (see below).

For predictions you will need the future tense, of course, and it is important to use **modifiers** in this case, such as ***it is likely that, in all probability.*** (See 8.1 below).

There are, of course, connectors that are typically used for conclusions. The first one on the list is the most unimaginative, and it is better to think of a more interesting one if you can.

> ***In conclusion, finally, therefore, consequently, clearly, it is clear, on the whole, in other words, generally speaking***

Remember that you can combine ***therefore*** with other connectors: e.g. *It is clear, therefore, that..; Generally speaking, therefore.*

Note: Beware of the common error of using ***more*** for emphasis. ***More*** is a comparative term.
For example:

People are more interested in making money

does not mean

People are very interested in making money.

If you say they are *more interested,* it should mean that they are *more interested than before,* or *more interested in making money* than something else, but if there is no comparison expressed or clearly implied, then *more* should not be used.

8. Style

There are two types of problems related to style: one is the effect of personal writing habits, the second is the result of cultural differences between your mother tongue or your educational background on the one hand, and English for academic purposes on the other.

8.1 Modifiers

One of the most important aspects of language use is the appropriate use of modifiers. This is because it is in this way that you show your understanding of the value of the points you are making - in other words, you are showing your own real understanding of the issues.

Look at these statements:

1. *The Internet has made life more convenient for everyone.*
2. *Computers are the perfect tool for education.*
3. *In some cases money may not increase our happiness all the time.*
4. *Oil is the best source of energy but nuclear energy is much better.*
5. *Traffic congestion is an absolute disaster in all cities.*
6. *Alternative energy probably seems to be a possible answer to our future energy needs.*

Can you see how each one is inappropriate?

The most common errors in the use of modifiers are:

overgeneralisation
overemphasis or exaggeration
understatement
confusion

Modifiers should be used to make your writing accurate and thoughtful. They include **adjectives, adverbs, modal verbs, phrases** and other parts of speech showing degree, emphasis etc.

8.2 Overgeneralisation

As we saw in section 4.7, overgeneralisation is very common. To modify overgeneralised statements, it is generally necessary to reduce the **scope** of the statement, by limiting the **quantity** or **frequency** or **area** involved.

Here are just a few common modifiers for this:

few	*many*	*most*
sometimes	*often*	*frequently*
generally	*common*	*widespread*

8.3 Overemphasis

Here the problem is not to exaggerate the **intensity** of a statement. The writer's **attitude** should show a suitable **degree of certainty.**

Degrees of intensity are expressed by terms such as:

rather	*quite*	*significant*
considerable	*very*	*dramatic*

Degrees of certainty can be shown by expressions such as:

maybe	*perhaps*	*possible*
definitely	*undoubtedly*	*generally speaking*
it is clear that		

and all the modal verbs:

may	*might*	*can*
could	*should*	*would*
must	*ought to*	

You can also use expressions that distance yourself from the statement, such as:

some people believe	*it is generally agreed*
according to most scientists	*it is said that*

And in conclusions it is useful to modify your statements with these expressions:

Therefore it seems that...	*It can be concluded that*
This indicates that	

Certain verbs, for example, can also show varying degrees of strength or certainty:

people are / tend to be	*this suggests / indicates / proves*
x causes y / x is a contributing factor to y	

8.4 Understatement and Confusion

While overstatement and exaggeration are more common, some students go the other way, and understate their case, or produce mixed and confused signals. This usually occurs when students mix some of the modifiers inappropriately.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE VERY ACCURATE IN USING MODIFIERS. Otherwise you can sound confused and unintelligent. Look at these examples:

It is clear that nuclear energy is likely to be a possible solution to our energy needs.
Several people have died of starvation because of the severe drought.
People depend significantly on the oceans for food.
Alternative energy probably seems to be the answer to our energy needs.
The major problem in modern cities might be air pollution.

TASK 23

Go back to the examples in 8.1 above, and those in 8.4, and modify them appropriately.

☛ *Answer Key*

TASK 24

Consider ways of increasing or reducing the strength of the following statements so that they become acceptable.

a) Television encourages violence.
b) Overpopulation will possibly cause many problems in the future.
c) Our environment is being totally destroyed.
d) People are only interested in money these days.
e) Maybe the continuing destruction of the rainforest will increase the greenhouse effect.
f) Students who go to study abroad could perhaps find that they may have some unexpected experiences.

8.5 Waffle

Lack of ideas is likely to result in a badly written essay. What commonly happens is that the writer either needs to fill up the paper with **empty, meaningless expressions** (often referred to as **waffle**), or there is a good deal of **repetition** of the same idea, or both. Here is an example of such a piece of writing:

> *Usually people in the world have their own habits of eating and each and every culture has its own customs about food. However, because of a new international, world-wide communication system, people can have contact with each other and so many people are learning about other people's customs and habits about food. Generally speaking, some people are becoming accustomed to food from other places as they get in touch with other cultures.*

TASK 25

Write down the ideas expressed in the above paragraph in one short sentence.

8.6 Formulaic and Thoughtless Writing

Many students appear to learn a basic structure and a few basic expressions and then attempt to apply these to every essay, no matter what the topic or the meaning. This can produce some strange results. Look at the following examples of mindless writing:

> *Nowadays sports are likely to be common throughout the world.*
>
> *Education has become an important thing in the last few decades.*

A student who writes like this is not showing much intelligence!
There are also connectors which are used without thought, or overused. The series:

> *Firstly.... Secondly.... Thirdly.... Finally.... In conclusion*

at the beginning of consecutive paragraphs reflects a lazy mind, writing to a formula.

Then there are **clichés,** which are more commonly misused by native speakers of English, but some learners also think that they are writing good, idiomatic English by using them. Clichés are expressions which have been overused in the language, and are generally a sign of lazy thinking.
Examples include

each and every one, food for thought, at the end of the day,
last but not least, without a doubt, as we know

It is better to avoid such expressions.

Another word which irritates many English teachers (and examination markers) is ***nowadays.*** It is seriously overused and is not at all necessary. It is very easy to simply leave it out in most cases:

(Nowadays) The Internet is widely used for educational purposes.

8.7 Immature Writing

Lack of vocabulary and limited knowledge of grammar are other causes of bad writing style.

Many students have excellent ideas but do not have sufficient vocabulary in English to express them. In such cases, some students simply use vocabulary incorrectly, and become incomprehensible, but more commonly students in this situation are likely to write in a much simpler style than is suitable for English for **academic** purposes. It is better to write simple, correct English than to try to write sophisticated English and do it badly, but of course a university or college entry test essay should not sound as if it was written by someone in primary school! The style you should aim for should be at least that of a good year 9 or year 10 student writing in their mother tongue.

Consider the following example:

Many people are worried about the environment. And they think we should do something to make it better. For example, instead of using fossil fuels we can use the sun's heat to make electricity. Or we can use the wind to make electricity. And we can also use water to make electricity.

There are no mistakes in the grammar of the above example, but it is clearly not the way a university student would be expected to write!

TASK 26

Rewrite the above example into one or two sentences, using more sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structures.

8.8 Cultural Differences in Style

One of the major problems that some students face is that their previous experience in writing has been in a style which is not similar to that expected in their test essays. This may be because

a) the type of writing they have done before is different, or
b) the style of writing valued by the mother tongue culture differs from the style expected in English.

Different Types of Writing

An essay is not like a letter, or a debate or political speech, or a text-book. You need to be aware of the differences in style that each requires.

TASK 27

Consider the following statements and decide which are suitable in style for an essay:

a) Dear lecturer, I want to tell you my views on the problems with the environment.

b) You might think there's no problem in having your kids watch TV for a few hours each day, but look out! They could be watching rubbish!

c) The air we depend on consists of oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide and other gases.

d) Is television a curse or a blessing? Should we value it or banish it from our homes? The answer is not easy to determine!

e) *If we allow the air to continue to be polluted by car and factory emissions, we are likely to find more and more of the population suffering from ill health.*

f) *There are television programs which are clearly unsuitable for children to watch and it is important to ensure that young people are protected from them.*

☛ *Answer Key*

More difficult to deal with are the **differences between writing styles in different cultures.** From my experience it seems to me, for example, that Japanese students value short, simple sentences, often beginning with *And, But* or *So.* Iranians, on the other hand, seem to have a tradition of valuing quite complex sentence structures, with very long subjects. The following is an adaptation of an Iranian student's writing:

> *Encouraging and providing suitable conditions for public transport by the use of public vehicles instead of private vehicles is another way of solving the problem.*

In Asian languages such as Chinese, Korean and Thai it is also often preferable to have the main idea expressed in noun phrases at the beginning of a sentence, rather like in the above example. Unfortunately, this not only sounds awkward in English, but it is also extremely difficult to write such complex sentences in **correct** English. The original sentence was, in fact, full of grammatical errors. The way to avoid this is to turn the sentence back to front:

> *Another way of solving the problem is to encourage and provide suitable conditions for the use of public vehicles instead of private ones.*

It is not possible to give one kind of advice about style to all students. Many textbooks on essay writing for native speakers encourage students to make their sentences less complex. This is because there is a tendency for typical English-speaking school-leavers to try to put too much into one sentence. However, if you are not a native speaker this advice may not be appropriate for you unless you too are trying to put too much into one sentence.

Repetition of words and phrases is another issue to consider. While in some languages repetition is used a great deal and quite acceptably, (such as Indonesian, for example), in English repetition is not highly valued, and writers make great efforts to avoid it.

TASK 28

Read the following two introductions to a simple essay topic and decide what differences there are in style, and which, if either, is preferable. Identify as many stylistic details as possible.

What are some of the difficulties that people face when living in a new country?

A.

When someone goes to live in another country he or she will find many new things that are not familiar. Some of these new things may be difficult for him or her to get used to. I want to talk about three different ways in which it may be difficult for a person to get used to living in a new country. The first way that it is difficult is what we may call physical, the second way is what we may call social, and the third way is what we may call mental.

B.

Without a doubt the transfer of an individual from one environment to another must be accompanied by a certain degree of difficulty, no matter who that individual may be, nor where she or he may have come from or transferred to. In all human endeavours it is possible, and indeed often desirable, to classify phenomena according to certain logical categories. Such a classification frequently assists in a better perception of the nature of the phenomena thus observed. In this case, also, it is intended to categorise commonly experienced difficulties in migration according to whether they fall into the physical, social or psychological domain.

☛ *Answer Key*

9. Proof-reading

There is usually not much time left during a test to go over your essay and correct any mistakes. In any case, you are probably under too much tension to see most of them. However, there are two types of error that it is relatively easy to check for and both involve the final letter S. This is frequently omitted. If you have time, skim through your essay and check whether

a) your **plural nouns** end in 's'
b) all **verbs in the third person singular, present tense,** also end in 's'.

TASK 29

Correct the following as quickly as possible:

There are many kind of pollution in our environment. Industry cause air pollution from smoke. It also create water pollution because of the dumping of toxic waste. Car also pollute the atmosphere with gas emission. Even ordinary citizen are responsible for polluting the environment by throwing rubbish onto road, beach and other public place.

10. Appearance

Theoretically, your handwriting and the layout and general appearance of your essay should not influence the examiner. Perhaps they don't. But in practice an essay which is neatly written and presented does make a better impression. Some small points to remember:

a) Leave a good margin. Then you have space for corrections if you want to make them.
b) Start each new paragraph on a new line and **indent** it.
c) If you want to cross out something, do it with **one neat line,** not a hard scribble. Do not use brackets to enclose crossed out words.
d) If you do not use Roman script in your mother tongue and have difficulty with it ~~p~~practise. If you are living in an English-speaking country, the children's section in your local library may have some books used to teach children to write, which could help you.

Finally, now that you have studied and understood everything in this book, there is no need to get nervous about the test!

GOOD LUCK!

Answer Key

Stage 1

TASK 1:

a) and c) ask the same question, but from opposing ends; b) and d) both compare the role of the home and the school in education; e) and f) deal with the same question from opposing ends.

Stage 2

TASK 4:

See Task 10 on p.25 for an example.

TASK 5:

a) **Leisure** activities: **Physical:** sport, exercise **Social:** friends, relations
Creative / Cultural: art, music, dance

b) **Education:** Better understanding: **knowledge** — better decisions, better life-style, wisdom;
jobs: satisfaction; pay **pleasure:** culture - books, music

c) **City life: Environment:** crowded, no nature, space;
Expectations: too much — time pressure; work pressure, transport problems.

TASK 6:

Cars: convenient — door-to-door **but:** no exercise, lower life expectancy
fast: **but:** not in traffic jams
cheaper: **but:** depends on cost of public transport. Cost high for society: air pollution!

TASK 7:

a) *harm* and *good*

b) This topic should ideally be discussed without evaluation. Social scientists have tried to find factual evidence for or against this. In practice, you can only draw conclusions from what you **assume** to be the case.

c) quality of life

d) *too much. Stress* is a term most people would understand the same way. But how much is *too much?*

TASK 8

factories and cars lead to air pollution;
rubbish and waste disposal lead to water pollution;
water pollution and lack of fresh water lead to fish dying;
deforestation leads to animals being endangered.

TASK 9

For: **Information:** education, news; general knowledge
Entertainment: music, sport, films
Communication

Against: **Time wasted:** homework not done
Physical: harms eyes, not enough exercise, harms bodies
Social: no socialisation / friends, buy unnecessary things

TASK 10

Trivial or irrelevant: children may forget to eat; not enough sleep; computer games are expensive; arguments in the family about what to watch.

TASK 11

Too broad or too specific or unusual:
own aeroplane; set up big projects; could gamble money away; high taxes; children argue about inheritance. You could also question whether healthy food is really expensive.

TASK 12

These are overgeneralisations or exaggerations: 1. 3. 7. 9. 10

TASK 13

Essay A starts well with generalisations that are quite acceptable. The examples used to support the argument, however, start to become problematic. The first example, about manufacturing design, seems reasonable. But *farmers do not need to plant and harvest slowly by hand* is only true of a very small percentage of farmers in the developed world, and ignores the fact that the majority of the world's population is still farming by hand! The statement about housewives spending their time gossiping is complete nonsense. The next paragraph becomes even more absurd. The next paragraph discusses improvements in telecommunications, which is a good point, but then exaggerates by claiming that this leads to peace and harmony among all nations. That is clearly far from the case.

Essay B begins with overgeneralisations: *everyone thinks* and *no more traditional skills* and *everyone is becoming the same,* and *no more spiritual values.* The whole essay has some good points, but they are all expressed in overgeneralisations, through the use of expressions like *all* and *every* and the lack of modifiers in the general statements *(e.g. They become selfish).*

Both essays have good ideas and are well organised, but both suffer from sweeping generalisations and exaggeration.

TASK 14

Here are the most obvious ones:

a) The danger of accidents in the reactors: e.g. Chernobyl. This can lead to the poisoning of the food chain in a huge area, the direct and indirect death of thousands of people, through nuclear blast, cancer and deformity and cancer even in unborn children and future generations.

b)The danger of storing radioactive waste: it is impossible to keep it completely safe: the containers can leak, there can be earthquakes if it is stored underground; terrorists can get access to it and use it to attack people.

TASK 16

Here is a suggested outline. There are of course other possibilities.

More time: good for family and friends and entertainment (sentences 3 and 4)
But could harm the economy: bad for employers, (6);
inconvenient: e.g. schools, work continuity (7, 10)
and anyway, no use: won't help unemployed (9)

(In case you believe this argument, the French government does not. They have introduced shorter working times for the whole country.)

TASK 17

1. Examples	2. Consequences	3. Comparisons
4. Evaluation	5. Speculation	6. Evaluation

Stage 3

TASK 18 **Diagnostic Grammar Test**

Here are possible corrections:

1. Computers are an essential part of our lives, because all aspects of modern society are affected by them. Before we had computers all transactions involving storing and retrieving information were very time-consuming and labour-intensive.

Errors: incomplete sentence and incorrect reduced relative clause.

2. The development of personal computers in particular affects people's lives because small businesses can easily afford them and this makes their work more efficient.

3. Now anyone who studies at university needs to learn to use computers. Most lecturers expect essays to be typed and in many subjects calculations and other tasks must also be done by computer.

Errors: Subject / verb agreement: *anyone* + singular

Countable nouns in the singular must have an article. Note: It is safer to use the plural.

The last use of *computer* can remain singular without an article because it is in a phrase: *by computer.*

Verb usage: expect *something to be done* has a different meaning from *expect that something is done.*

4. In recent years software packages have become easier to use and so many people who thought before that they were too old to learn have been able to learn simple word processing.

Errors: tenses.

5. Schools as well as colleges provide computer courses in developed countries, but it still needs a big investment for such equipment to be made available to many students, and most schools in developing countries cannot afford this.

Errors: active/ passive

6. We cannot know what future developments there will be in this area, but most people think that computers will be even more widespread in the next decades.

Errors: modal verbs and tenses.

TASK 19

1 and **4** go together: *country....government* are the links
3 and 10: *most people....other people*
5 and **2**: *material goods....possessions*
8 and 6: *spiritual* is repeated
7 and **9**: *changes* is repeated

TASK 20

b and g. (c and h are not good as they simply repeat the topic in slightly different words.)

TASK 21

a) In fact / Actually
b) However / On the other hand
c) However / Nevertheless

TASK 23

These are merely some suggestions. Many other possibilities exist.

8.1 1. The Internet has made life more convenient for many people.
2. Computers are a very valuable tool for education.
3. Money often does not increase happiness.
4. Oil is the easiest source of energy to use, but nuclear energy is cleaner.
5. Traffic congestion is a major problem in many cities.
6. Alternative energy seems to be the best answer to our future energy needs.

8.2 Nuclear energy is a possible solution to our energy needs.
Many people have died of starvation because of the severe drought.
People depend to a great extent on the oceans for food.
Alternative energy seems to be the answer to our energy needs.
A major problem in modern cities is air pollution.

TASK 27

i) An essay is not a letter.
ii) The style is informal, spoken English.
iii) This type of definition is not necessary or useful for a short essay.
iv) Do not use 'rhetorical' questions or exclamations. This is not a speech.
v) Good.
vi Good.

TASK 28

The first introduction has two main problems: the awkward use of *he or she* and *him or her* and the repetitiousness of the style. To avoid the first problem, it is better to use the plural form, and the repetition should be cut out by using relative clauses. This would give the following:

> *When people go to live in another country they will find many things that are not familiar, which may be difficult to get used to. I want to talk about three different kinds of problems, which we may call physical, social and mental.*

The second introduction is full of what is sometimes called waffle. It is important to express your ideas in the shortest form necessary. An improvement would be:

> *If a person transfers from one environment to another there are likely to be difficulties. In this essay I propose to discuss these in terms of physical, social and psychological problems.*

Students sometimes say that if they reduce their writing in the above way, they will not have enough to say to fill up the paper. This problem is easily solved by giving as many concrete examples as you need, to support your points.

APPENDIX A ESSAY TOPICS

1. *We live in a technological age. However, technology cannot solve all the world's problems. Therefore some people argue that we need to place less emphasis on technological solutions and more on other values.*

2. *Many modern children spend a great deal of time sitting in front of a television or computer screen. This is extremely harmful to their development. Therefore parents should strictly limit the time children spend in this way.*

3. *The environment is one of the most important issues in the world today, but governments are not doing enough about it. To what extent do you think that individuals can help to protect the environment?*

4. *The Internet has provided great benefits, but at the same time it has also created new problems and inequalities. Is it possible to control some of these problems?*

5. *It is often argued that children must be protected from unsuitable material on TV and the Internet by government censorship. Others say that it is the parents' responsibility to control what their children do and watch. To what extent do you think that this is true?*

6. *Most education systems rely on examinations to encourage children to study, but as a result children suffer from too much stress and they never learn to be creative. Therefore examinations should be abolished. Do you agree?*

7. *Most pollution, especially air and water pollution, is caused by industry. If we want to protect the environment we should make factories and other forms of industry pay for all the pollution that they cause. That is the only way to make sure that the owners will make a serious effort to reduce the pollution that they cause. To what extent do you agree with this opinion?*

8. *In every city the car is king of the road. Cars cause death and injury and air pollution, and they make life difficult and dangerous for others. It is time to reduce the number of cars in our cities and to encourage other means of transport. Do you agree with this opinion?*

9. *'Money cannot buy happiness' it is often claimed. But with money you can buy most of the things that are necessary for happiness: good food, accommodation, entertainment, travel, quality health care etc. No wonder most people want to make as much money as possible. Do you agree or disagree?*

10. *To be successful in education it is more important to be a good student than to have good teachers. Would you support that statement?*

11. *At present we rely on oil for most of our energy needs. However, oil is a fossil fuel and causes air pollution, and it will eventually run out. Nuclear energy is the only practical and clean source of energy for the world. Do you agree?*

12. *Modern technology has increased our material wealth, but not our happiness. To what extent do you agree with this statement?*

13. *The increasing role of English in the world means that the learning of other languages is being neglected. This will have serious results for the continued use of these languages, and of their cultures. What is your opinion?*

14. *Young people are said to have lost many of the traditional values of the older generation. This does not matter, because the old values have no relevance in the modern world. We need to develop a whole new set of values.*
Do you support this statement?

15. *Professional sport involves large sums of money and receives enormous media coverage. Meanwhile serious culture, including music, art and theatre, is badly neglected. This is making our society more shallow. Do you think this is the case?*

16. *International sports competitions are the best way to prevent conflict. National feelings can be expressed in friendly competition, rather than fighting, and sports heroes are better role models than fighters. The large sums of money spent on international sport competitions such as the Olympic Games are therefore justified. Do you agree?*

17. *As there is increasing unemployment in the world, while at the same time those who have jobs are working harder and harder, it would be better to have 4 day working weeks for everyone, and so create more jobs. What is your opinion about this suggestion?*

18. *Tobacco and alcohol are drugs that cause addiction and health problems.*
Should they be made illegal? Or should all drugs be legalised?

19. *We are surrounded by advertising. Some people think that this is good, because it gives us choices as consumers, but others argue that it makes people selfish and greedy for more and more goods. Do you think that there should be less advertising?*

20. *We know that many kinds of animals can feel pain and emotional suffering just as humans do. It is therefore necessary to support animal rights as well as human rights. Do you agree?*

APPENDIX B

THREE MODEL ESSAYS

1. **The responsibility for the environment rests with the individual and not only with the government. Do you agree?**

Everyone is becoming aware that the environment is a serious issue. There is bad air and water pollution everywhere and we also know that the greenhouse effect is changing our weather and that the hole in the ozone layer is causing skin cancer. However, not enough is being done to solve these problems, because most people seem to be waiting for governments to make the decisions. In fact, the responsibility for protecting the environment must be shared by everyone. Individuals can and should do many things to help to solve the problem.

First of all people can make sure that they are responsible in the way that they dispose of waste. If people throw rubbish like plastic into rivers and oceans, it always stays there, and causes fish and sea-birds to die. It is also important to make sure that we do not buy goods that have too much wrapping on them, especially plastic wrapping, because if we do, we are adding to the huge amounts of waste.

People also need to be responsible in the way that they use water. In some countries, like Australia, an enormous amount of water is wasted for swimming pools, washing cars and so on. Most countries are running out of fresh water.

If people used their cars less, this would help to prevent the greenhouse effect. Everyone can try to use public transport more, or use bicycles, or even walk, instead of using their cars for even short trips.

Finally, the most important thing that individuals can do is to let their governments know that they want something to be done about the environment. It is obvious that the governments will not do anything unless the people force them to.

It is therefore clear that individuals must take responsibility for the environment, otherwise it will soon be too late, and we and the next generation will suffer serious consequences.

2. **It is sometimes argued that because tertiary education is of greater benefit to the individual than to the society, all students should pay full fees. What is your opinion?**

As the modern world is becoming increasingly complex and knowledge is becoming more and more specialised, there is no doubt that tertiary education is necessary both for the whole society and for individuals who want to ensure that they have a good profession. The question of who benefits more is important to societies and governments in deciding who should be expected to pay for the costs involved. This is a difficult question.

There is no doubt that the whole society benefits. In all developing countries there has been a strong effort to raise the educational level of the society by putting as much money as possible into providing educational institutions. Universities and colleges are, however, expensive to run. Because of this, it is felt that such countries are held back in all forms of development. Without enough educated professionals such as doctors, teachers, scientists and engineers, developing countries cannot move ahead. Governments in such countries provide scholarships, or free education, to as many students as they can afford, because they realise that the whole country will benefit. Many developed countries also try to offer free tertiary education because they want a highly educated population.

However, there is also a strong argument that individuals benefit so much from tertiary education that they should be expected to pay for it. Doctors, lawyers, accountants and engineers have some of the highest incomes in most societies. People argue that the government, and therefore the tax payers, should not pay for students who will later earn more than anyone else. Moreover, most students come from the middle classes, and their parents can afford to pay for their fees. There are, of course, some students who cannot afford to pay. This problem can be overcome by a system like the one being used in Australia, for example. The government gives the students a loan to pay for their fees, and later, when they are earning a good salary, they repay the loan.

It is probably impossible to decide whether the individual or the society benefits more from tertiary education, but since both benefit, the costs should probably be paid for by both equally.

3. The Internet has provided great benefits, but at the same time it has also created new dangers and inequalities. Is it possible to control some of these problems?

No-one can deny that the Internet has revolutionised much of society. Individuals benefit from access to almost endless amounts of information on the World Wide Web, as well as being able to communicate easily and cheaply with friends and strangers. For the business world the impact has been even more dramatic. Vast sums of money are constantly being instantly transferred around the world by electronic means. Banks and other businesses now totally depend on the Internet.

There are, however, significant dangers in this development. The first problem that most people think of is the danger of hackers invading the system and either obtaining secret information or introducing viruses that cause immense damage. It is unlikely that this problem can ever be completely solved. As soon as the technology is developed to overcome one hacker, another one produces some new method.

Apart from this technical problem, however, there is a much deeper one, and that is the inequality between individuals and societies, which the Internet is making worse. The gap between the rich and the poor is growing rapidly in the world, and access to the Internet is a significant part of the problem. Developing countries where schools cannot afford computers, and small businesses which do not have Internet access are being left further and further behind.

Some people believe that if computers are widely distributed in poor societies that this would be an important way to reduce the inequalities. Others feel that the problem is much deeper, and needs to be dealt with by bodies such as the World Trade Organisation.

The answer is probably that all possible methods should be used to break down the inequalities, including access to the Internet, to ensure that the world does not become more and more unstable.

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Gabi Duigu has been teaching English for Academic Purposes and Test Preparation in many countries, and to students from even more countries, for over 30 years.

She has been an IELTS examiner since 1990.